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CHAPTER 1: PROFILE

Introduction

Somalia occupies a strategic geopolitical position on the Horn of Africa. The people of Somalia, mostly Sunni Muslims, number roughly 10 million. More than half the population lives in rural areas as nomadic herders. Nomadic life, combined with clan family membership, fosters local governance and a rejection of centralized authority. Many ethnic Somalis live in the nearby countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti, and Yemen.

Civil war since the late 1980s has destroyed Somalia’s infrastructure and blocked most economic activities. Because of power struggles among clan militia, rival warlords, and Islamic insurgents, thousands of Somalis have been killed and millions displaced. As of 2012, a transitional federal government occupies Mogadishu under UN protection, while the northern regions of Somaliland and Puntland operate as separate entities. The south is a battleground for Islamic militants and armed forces of neighboring countries. Somalia suffers from a complex humanitarian emergency brought on by decades of endemic poverty, recurrent drought, and floods. These conditions may account for continuing piracy along Somalia’s coast.

Geography

Somalia lies mostly north of the equator in the Horn of Africa, the continent’s easternmost point. It is a midsized African country with the longest seacoast on the continent, facing the Gulf of Aden to the north and the Indian Ocean to the east. Somalia borders Djibouti to the northwest, Ethiopia to the west, and Kenya to the southwest. Part of the 1,600-km (994-mi) border with Ethiopia is in dispute.

The northern part of the country is mountainous, with heights reaching 1,800 m (5,905 ft) in the west and 2,100 m (6,890 ft) in the east. The highest point, in the north central area, is known as Shimber Berris or Surud Cad; this peak rises more than 2,400

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m (7,874 ft) in the Karkaar Mountains. From these highlands, plains and plateaus extend north toward the coast (Guban Plain) and south toward the border with Ethiopia (Haud Plain, Ogo Plateau). The central Somali Plateau and southern flatlands average 180 m (590 ft) in elevation and descend gradually toward the Indian Ocean. Along the southern coastal plain, beaches can be short and steep, with unstable sand dunes.

**Climate**

Seasonal monsoons, irregular rainfall, and recurring drought and floods characterize Somalia’s climate. The year’s four seasons alternate between wet and dry. The main rainy season, *gu*, lasts from April to June; a dry season, *xagaa*, from June to September; a second rainy season, *dayr*, from October to December; and the main dry season, *jilaal*, from December to March. Average annual rainfall is 28.2 cm (11 in), but the amount varies greatly from north to south. Sparse rainfall in some parts of the country causes moderate droughts every 3–4 years and severe droughts about every 9 years.

Average temperatures throughout the country are 30º–40ºC (86º–104ºF) year round, with cooler temperatures in the southern coastal regions and at higher elevations. In the north, winter months bring below-freezing temperatures to the highlands, but summer heats the Gulf of Aden coast to over 45ºC (113ºF). Humidity varies more in the north, fluctuating from 40% in the afternoon to 85% at night. In the south, temperatures range from 20º–40ºC (68°–104°F), with the hottest part of the year occurring February through April. Along the Indian Ocean coast, relative humidity hovers around 70% in both wet and dry seasons.

**Bodies of Water**

Along Somalia’s east coast, an offshore current to the south keeps water temperatures surprisingly cool, especially compared to the warm temperatures in the Gulf of Aden. In the northwest, Somalia is strategically situated along the southern approach to Bab el Mandeb.

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Sometimes referred to as the Mande Strait, this waterway separates Africa from the Arabian Peninsula and connects the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean.14

Two constantly flowing rivers, the Juba and the Shabelle, originate in Ethiopia and flow through southern Somalia into the Indian Ocean.15 Agricultural activity in Somalia centers around the fertile areas formed by the basins of these rivers. In rainy seasons, the Shabelle joins the Juba before reaching the Indian Ocean near Kismaayo, and damaging floods periodically occur.16, 17, 18 In the north, the Dharoor and Nugaal Valleys both have impermanent rivers that flow east into the Indian Ocean at Xaafuun and Eyl, respectively.19

Cities

*Mogadishu*

Located in the south on the Indian Ocean, Mogadishu is Somalia’s capital and largest city. Originally an important Arab and Persian trading settlement popular in the gold trade, it became the capital of Italian Somaliland at the turn of the 20th century and of independent Somalia in 1960.20, 21, 22 It remains a major deepwater port and center of commerce and transportation.23 Continuous violence during decades of civil war has destroyed many parts of the city.24, 25 The United Nations reported 184,000 internally displaced persons in

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Mogadishu in 2011, and some aid workers describe the road from the city as having “probably the largest concentration of displaced people on the planet.”

Hargeysa

Hargeysa is situated 1,334 m (4,377 ft) above sea level in the Ogo Highlands of Somalia’s northwest interior. The city’s elevation creates a mild climate, and the surrounding area is the only region that supports farming other than the Juba and Shabelle river valleys in the south. Hargeysa began as a religious community in the 19th century and later became the capital of colonial British Somaliland. Currently it is the de facto capital of the self-proclaimed Republic of Somaliland. The city was destroyed in a 1988 air attack during the civil war. It has since been rebuilt and has an international airport, a university, and the only traffic lights in the country. Hargeysa is a center for livestock trade.

Berbera

Situated in the northwest on the Gulf of Aden, Berbera is the main port of self-proclaimed Somaliland. A Muslim settlement since medieval times, Berbera was claimed by the Portuguese, the Ottoman Turks, and the Egyptians and was the capital of British Somaliland until 1941. In the 1980s, the United States military operated from Berbera’s Soviet-built port facilities. During the subsequent decades of conflict, the port was damaged but remained commercially operational. Today exports from the port include livestock, frankincense, myrrh, and gum arabic. Like many cities and towns in Somalia, Berbera’s population varies seasonally, swelling when animals are brought to market and decreasing when hot weather sends people to higher, cooler areas.

Kismaayo

Kismaayo (also known as Chisimayu) is Somalia’s southernmost port and the regional capital of Jubbada Hoose. The city is on the Indian Ocean near the mouth of the Juba River. Formerly a fishing settlement, Kismaayo was founded in 1872 by the Sultan of Zanzibar. The British took control of the city in 1887, later ceding the area to Italian colonists. The United States built a port for Kismaayo in the 1960s and renovated it 30 years later. The deepwater port supports Somalia’s banana exports. Political violence has taken its toll on the city, and piracy has become a problem in the area in recent years. Since 2010, al-Shabaab insurgent forces have controlled Kismaayo.

Merca

Merca (also known as Marka) is a port city on the Indian Ocean 90 km (56 mi) southwest of Mogadishu; it is the regional capital of Shabeellaha Hoose. Somalis began to settle the area in the 13th century, but it had been an international trading port since the 10th century. Because of offshore coral reefs, shipping at the port is somewhat limited. Islamist insurgents currently control the city.

History

Early History

The Horn of Africa has been inhabited since prehistoric times. Somalia was known to the ancient Egyptians as the Land of Punt (“God’s Land”) and was the destination of Cushite peoples who migrated toward the coast from the Ethiopian and Kenyan highlands of eastern Africa’s Great...

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Rift Valley. Other early occupants of modern-day Somali territory were tribal Bantu and Boni peoples. Arab and Asian merchant ships visited Somali shores well before the first century C.E., and by the seventh century, coastal towns were exporting goods such as ghee (clarified butter), frankincense, myrrh, and slaves. Early Arab geographers described Somalis as “black Berbers.”

Islam arrived in Somalia in the 7th century; it took hold from the 11th to 13th centuries with the emergence of Muslim patriarchs who founded major Somali clans. For the next several centuries, Somalis fought in religious wars, joining regional Muslim kingdoms against Christian Abyssinia (modern day Ethiopia). In the 16th century, recently arrived Portuguese and Turkish traders found themselves involved in a struggle between the Islamic state of Adal (currently northwest Somalia) and Ethiopia. In later centuries, Ottoman Turks claimed the Horn from the north. From the south, the Sultanate of Zanzibar claimed parts of Somalia.

Europeans began to explore the interior of Somalia in the 19th century. British, French, and Italian interest in the region grew with the completion in 1869 of the Suez Canal. Egypt and Ethiopia also participated in the scramble to colonize Africa. Reviving Ottoman claims, Egypt occupied the seaports of Berbera and Bulhar, but later ceded its Somali territories to Britain. When Egypt left, Ethiopia gained control (but not ownership) of interior Somali clan lands from the Europeans. Somalis resisted both African and European colonization. Religious leader and early nationalist Mohamed Abdullah Hassan led his followers in a 20-year rebellion against British, Italian, and Ethiopian imperialists. The British eventually retreated toward Somalia’s northern coast, but the Italians under Mussolini later annexed Eritrea, Ethiopia, and southern Somalia, thereby surrounding the British (and French) Somaliland colonies. In 1940, during World War II, Italy seized British Somaliland. In 1941, the British recaptured their Somali territory as well as Italian Abyssinia (Ethiopia/Eritrea) and much of Italian Somaliland.

Independent Somalia

After the war, the British military administered Somali territories with an eye toward Somali self-government. In 1947, Italy renounced its claim to Somali territory and in 1948 Britain handed over to Ethiopia the Ogaden region and neighboring Somali territories. In 1949 the United Nations created an Italian-administered international trusteeship to manage the transition to an independent Somalia. The British granted full independence on 26 June 1960 and the Italians on 1 July. The two former colonies joined immediately to form the new nation of the Somali Republic.

Pan-Somalism, the idea of unifying all Somali communities in Somalia, French Somaliland (present-day Djibouti), northern Kenya, and Ethiopia, dominated the government’s first years of foreign policy. Border disputes with Kenya and Ethiopia erupted in hostilities by 1964. In 1967, the prime minister encouraged the government to renounce claims on Somali communities outside the country, but many Somalis objected to reconciliation with Ethiopia. By 1969 this discontent, combined with accusations of election fraud and the president’s assassination, resulted in a bloodless coup in which the army took power under the direction of Major General Mohamed Siad Barre.

Barre ruled Somalia for more than 20 years. Early on, he tried to limit the power of clans in government. He declared Somalia a socialist Islamist state, seeking aid from Soviet nations, and joining the Arab League. His social engineering projects included the nationalization of industries, healthcare development, and nationwide literacy campaigns. But when his soldiers took control of the border region of Ogaden in 1977–78, Moscow supplied Cuban troops and Soviet advisors to Ethiopia, resulting in Somalia’s eventual defeat in the Ogaden War. Betrayed by the Soviets, Barre turned to the United States for support. USAID reopened its mission in Somalia in 1978, and in 1980 U.S. forces gained access to the port of Berbera.

Conflict and Instability

Conflicts among Somali clans reemerged and worsened in the 1980s. After a Majeerteen clan coup failed at the end of the Ogaden War, some members formed the antigovernment Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), which was based in Ethiopia and backed by Libya’s President Muammar Qaddafi. Barre armed several clan militias for the purpose of fighting

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against rival clans. He dismissed other clans from his government in favor of members of his own clan. Isaaq clan members formed the Somali National Movement (SNM) in Hargeysa in 1981, and Hawiye clan members from central Somalia formed the United Somali Congress (USC) in 1989, with outside bases in Ethiopia. Armed conflicts between the Barre government and these groups forced hundreds of thousands of Somalis to flee to Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti. In 1990, Barre proposed government reforms, but they were too late and opposition forces pushed him from power in 1991.

As Barre went into exile, the central government in Mogadishu collapsed. The SNM took over former British Somaliland, declaring in 1991 the independent nation of the Republic of Somaliland. The SSDF took control of the northwest, declaring the autonomous region of Puntland in 1998. Mogadishu and much of southern Somalia became contested territory, as the competing USC factions of the Somali National Alliance (SNA) and the Somali Salvation Alliance (SSA) continued to fight Barre supporters. The deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians from violence, disease, and famine prompted a U.S.-led international intervention in 1992–93, which involved more than 35,000 U.S. troops. After the unexpected deaths of U.S. soldiers in October 1993 (the infamous Black Hawk Down incident), U.S. troops withdrew in 1994, and UN forces left in 1995.

Recent History

Many reconciliation attempts in the ensuing years have failed. Efforts in Djibouti (2000) and Kenya (2002) led to the establishment of the current Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in 2004. Ethiopia entered Somalia in 2006 to defend the TFG from the al-Qaeda-linked Islamic Courts Union (ICU), which had taken power in Mogadishu and the south of the country.

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98 The Republic of Somaliland now claims the Awdal, Woqooyi Galbeed, Togdheer, Sanaag, and Sool regions.
UN and the African Union sent peacekeeping troops (AMISOM) to Somalia in 2007. A UN-brokered peace deal in 2009 led to the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops and the election of ICU leader Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed as TFG president. The TFG, seeking support from Islamists, agreed to adopt shari’a law for Somalia.

Al-Shabaab (The Youth), an Islamic insurgent group, rose to challenge the TFG. Formerly the “special forces” of the ICU and currently fighting to control southern and central Somalia, al-Shabaab has branded Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed a traitor for his moderate presidential stance. In 2010, pursuing an international jihad called by al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for a bombing in Uganda as retaliation against Ugandan troop contributions to AMISOM. In late 2011, Kenyan and Ethiopian troops reentered Somalia to combat the group. In early 2012, joint efforts had recovered Mogadishu from al-Shabaab.

Government

The status of the country is unsettled. The Transitional Federal Government (TFG) controls only parts of Mogadishu, but only with outside (AMISOM) military aid. The TFG’s mandate to govern expires in 2012, by which time a permanent government, recognized throughout the country, is supposed to be established. Toward this end, Britain (which has a Somali diaspora community of 200,000) convened an international conference on Somalia in February 2012, but some power-holding groups, including al-Shabaab, did not attend. In the meantime, the United States and much of the global community have adopted a dual-track strategy, working with regional power holders to conduct business and provide aid.

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108 Al-Shabaab’s full name is Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahidin (Mujahidin Youth Movement).
Media

During Siad Barre’s regime, the Ministry of Information and National Guidance controlled all media.115 (Local opinion of state-provided information was expressed in the nickname of the sole national newspaper—‘ar-I-Dhamee, “I Dare You to Finish Me.”) In the post-republic era, competing regional outlets disseminate information via print, television, and radio (the most widespread form of media). Somaliland and Puntland continue to exert governmental control over broadcasting, and the transitional government in Mogadishu operates a local FM station. From 2009 to 2011, 16 journalists were killed in the country, and 2012 began with the closure of a TV station and the arrests of dozens of journalists in Somaliland.117, 118 Despite such dangers, private outlets, especially FM radio stations, offer a variety of domestic and international product such as Al-Jazeera, CNN, and BBC (including BBC’s Somali language service). The Somali diaspora makes good use of the Internet and social media, but a weak communications infrastructure in Somalia currently supports only about 106,000 domestic users.119 Cellular phones are used on a much wider scale (648,200 subscribers in 2010).120

Economy

The Somali Republic never fully achieved a stable, self-sufficient state economy. Today, the economy again operates without centralized regulation and without formal monetary or economic policies.121 Somalia’s traditional economy is based on herding and farming, supplemented by the earnings that Somalis who work abroad, send home.122, 123, 124 Livestock is Somalia’s main export, followed by other agricultural products such as fruit, wood charcoal, and fish. During the recent decades of natural and political disasters, food has become the main import, followed by petroleum products, transportation vehicles and equipment, and other

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123 Benjamin Powell, Ryan Ford, and Alex Nowrasteh, “Somalia After State Collapse: Chaos or Improvement?” (working paper no. 64, Independent Institute, Oakland, CA, 30 November 2006), http://www.independent.org/pdf/working_papers/64_somalia.pdf
manufactured goods.\textsuperscript{125, 126, 127} Unregulated trade includes the import of the drug khat and the internationally prohibited movement of arms.\textsuperscript{128, 129}

When the Republic collapsed, corrupt leaders left the failed state with billions of dollars of public debt (still unpaid) to commercial and developmental creditors.\textsuperscript{130, 131} Yet the post-republic private sector includes many recent business that have had a degree of success. Wireless communications have joined the centuries-old tradition of textile production and the colonial-era business of sugar refining as a functioning light industry.\textsuperscript{132} Private investment, especially from the Somali diaspora, is evident in construction, transportation, and small-scale manufacturing, and trade continues with neighbors and Asian countries.\textsuperscript{133} China appears to be pursuing oil and gas concessions in the Mudug area, and in 2012 Canadian and Australian companies began drilling for oil in Puntland.\textsuperscript{134, 135, 136} Without a formal banking sector, money transfer services, known as hawala, have become big business, handling millions of dollars, pounds, Euros in remittance transfers every month.\textsuperscript{137, 138} International law enforcement agencies would like to stop criminal use of hawala. But closing down these money transfer operations would threaten the well-being of

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\setlength{\itemsep}{0pt}
\bibitem{129} Pieter D. Wezeman, “Arms Flows and the Conflict in Somalia” (background paper, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, October 2010), 3–5, \texttt{http://books.sipri.org/files/misc/SIPRIBP1010b.pdf}
\bibitem{138} POGAR (Programme on Governance in the Arab Region), UN Development Programme, “Financial Transparency: Somalia,” n.d., \texttt{http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/finances.asp?cid=17}
\end{thebibliography}
those Somalis who depend on remittances for living expenses, schooling, healthcare, and flight from war or famine.139, 140, 141, 142

Foreign aid is still critical to the Somali economy. By international standards, half the population requires help with food, health, and safety, and 250,000 are starving. In 2012, the UN requested USD 1.5 billion in its consolidated appeal for humanitarian assistance for Somalia.143

**Ethnic Groups**

The Somali are one of the Eastern Cushitic peoples of the Horn of Africa, related to the Oromo in Ethiopia, the Afar in Djibouti, the Beja in Sudan, and the Reendille and Boni in Kenya.144 Somalis are often described as a linguistically, culturally, and religiously homogenous people who trace their lineage to a shared founding father.145, 146, 147 But the emphasis on lineage as the organizing principle of social life also marks differences among Somalis—in dialects, traditions, and interpretations of Islam—that trumps ethnic solidarity.148, 149, 150, 151 Somalis divide themselves into two groups. The nomadic, herding Samaale are dominant in the north but are present throughout the country. The more settled, farming Sab are concentrated in the river regions of the south.152, 153 Samaale belong to one of four major nomadic clans: Dir, Daarood, Isaaq, or

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152 Mohamed Diriyeh Abdullahi, *Culture and Customs of Somalia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 9, 48 (fn. 9).
Hawiye, who together make up roughly three-fourths of the population. Sab belong to one of two agricultural clans: Digil or Rahanwiin, and are perhaps a fifth of the population.\(^{154}\) (Some sources report that sab as a common noun means “ignoble,” and that Rahanwiin and Digil clan members consider the name Sab derogatory.)\(^{155, 156}\) A few ethnic Somalis (less than 1%) fall outside these clan relationships and are often engaged in low-status occupations (leather and metal workers, hunters, barbers and circumcisers).\(^{157, 158, 159}\)

Somalis tend to view other ethnic groups in Somalia as lower-class outsiders, even when these groups predate Somali occupation of the territory.\(^{160, 161}\) Such groups include hunting and foraging peoples like the Eyle and the Boni and a variety of Bantu peoples, some of whose ancestors may have arrived as slaves.\(^{162}\) Nonindigenous peoples in Somalia have included Arabs, Persians, Indians, Pakistanis, the British, and Italians.\(^{163, 164}\) Some Somalis trace their lineages to Arab ancestors, which highlights their Muslim religious identity.\(^{165, 166, 167}\) Many Europeans left the Somali Republic shortly after independence, and most Arabs and Italians have reportedly since departed.\(^{168}\) Estimates of the non-Somali population in the country have risen from to 2% to 15%, possibly because of the movement of displaced persons throughout the Horn of Africa.\(^{169, 170}\)

\(^{155}\) Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi, Culture and Customs of Somalia (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 48 (fn. 9).
Languages

Somali

Somali is spoken by more than 13 million people around the world and has long contributed to a shared, Pan-Somali identity.\(^{171}\)\(^{172}\) A branch of the Afro-Asiatic linguistic family that includes Afar (spoken in Djibouti), Oromo (spoken in Ethiopia), and Arabic, the Somali language has many dialects that fall into three regional groups: Common (or Northern) Somali, Coastal (or Banaadir) Somali, and Central Somali (which includes the Maay and Digil dialects).\(^{173}\)\(^{174}\)\(^{175}\) These dialect groups are associated with the clan families that occupy the regions: for example, the Maay dialect is associated with the Rahanwiin clan of central Somalia.\(^{176}\) Common Somali, now called Standard Somali, is the most common dialect in local and international broadcasting and in written communication.\(^{177}\) Other dialects vary to such an extent that some linguists consider them different languages, such as Maay and Garre spoken in central Somalia.\(^{178}\)\(^{179}\)\(^{180}\)

Although religious scholars occasionally wrote the Somali language in Arabic script, Somalis preferred spoken poetry and memorized recitation well into the 20th century. A modified Latin alphabet became the official orthography (and Somali became the sole official language) in 1972.\(^{181}\)\(^{182}\)\(^{183}\) Subsequent literacy campaigns claimed a tenfold increase in nationwide reading ability, and the UN later estimated Somali literacy at 24%.\(^{184}\)\(^{185}\)

\(^{183}\) Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi, *Culture and Customs of Somalia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 73.
Other Languages: Arabic, English, Italian, and Swahili

Arabic, the language of Muhammad and the Quran, serves as a unifying element of Somali identity. About 20% of Somali vocabulary comes from Arabic, from old words related to religion and international trade to newer phrases related to modern finance and government. Bantu peoples living along the southern coast speak varieties of Swahili.

Chapter 1 Assessment

1. Somalia is located in a geographic area known as the Cape of Africa.
   False
   Somalia is located on the eastern coast of the African continent, in an area known as the Horn of Africa.

2. Pan-Somalism, the desire to unite Somali communities in and out of Somalia, has been a problematic foreign policy for Somalia.
   True
   Objections to the early republic’s reconciliation with Ethiopia contributed to a military coup, and losing the Ogaden War triggered the decline of Barre’s government.

3. Somalia’s Transitional Federal Government (TFG) controls all the major cities in the country.
   False
   UN forces help the TFG control Mogadishu, but in the north, Somaliland controls Hargeysa and Berbera, and in the south, Islamic insurgents control Kismaayo.

4. Somalia has more cell phone users than Internet users.
   True
   There are about 106,000 Internet users in Somalia. Cellular phones are used on a much wider scale (648,200 subscribers in 2010).

5. Fruit and fish are Somalia’s principal exports.
   False
   Livestock is Somalia’s main product and export. Other agricultural exports are fruit, wood charcoal, and fish.
CHAPTER 2: RELIGION

Introduction

In Somalia, religion pervades daily life. Pre-Islamic spiritual traditions influence household rituals and public festivities. Children learn Qur’anic verses at an early age, and a large number of Somalis memorize the entire Qur’an. Mosques are found in major cities and rural villages. Nomadic Somalis rely on traveling teachers or wadaddo (Somali local religious specialists) to lead prayers, perform marriages, bless livestock, and resolve disputes. Wadaddo learning and power are derived from Islamic teachings and traditional knowledge of astronomy, medicine, and psychology.

Islam is central to Somali identity. In the words of a Somali elder, any non-Somali “would not be a good Muslim.” Like Jews and Christians, Somalis are “people of the book.” They are said to be descended from Samaal, the biblical Ham, son of Noah. But as Muslims, Somalis believe that Allah’s final revelations were to Muhammad, the last Prophet, as set down in the Qur’an. Virtually all ethnic Somalis are Sunni Muslims, mostly of the Shafi’i sect, one of the four major Sunni schools of shari’a (Islamic law). (Small communities of Christians and people of other faiths, largely among non-Somali ethnic groups, keep a low profile.) Sunni Islam is the major branch of Islam worldwide, in which the community of believers (not a hierarchy of leaders) is “the locus of religious authority.”

197 Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi, Culture and Customs of Somalia (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 55.
Sufism

Sufism is an Islamic mystic philosophy that spread through the Somali population in the 15th century. Three sects of Sufism are common in Somalia: Qadiriya, Ahmediya, and Saalixiya.\(^{203}\) Sufis seek to elevate their souls to the presence of God by following a correct path (Arabic *tariqa*, Somali *dariiqa*), typically one of self-denial and trance-inducing ritual.\(^{204, 205, 206}\) Religious brotherhoods of Sufi dervishes are known as *tariqas*. Membership in *tariqa* brotherhoods (and in other religious groups) is often determined by clan membership. Conversely, the religious brotherhood becomes a family for a new member in both a practical and a spiritual sense.\(^{207}\) *Tariqa* leaders become known as sheiks, a title of respect that reflects their advanced Islamic learning and distinguishes them from *waddaddo*.\(^{208}\) Somalis believe that *tariqa* leaders (indeed, all legitimate leaders) have *baraka*, a power to grant divine blessings or bring harm to others. *Tariqa* leaders (as well as exceptionally pious individuals or clan founders) may become saints after they die, and their tombs may become pilgrimage destinations.\(^ {209}\)

Exchange 1: Remember Sheik Abdul-Kadir

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Somali (Sufi):</th>
<th>Do you seek blessing from Sheik Abdul-Kadir (saint)?</th>
<th>sheyKh 'abdul-kaadir ma ka doo'aaysataa?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>No, thank you.</td>
<td>maaya, mahadsanid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somali (Sufi):</td>
<td>Okay!</td>
<td>waa tahaay.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In central and southern Somalia, *tariqa* brotherhoods have created religious communities of work, learning, and worship known as *jamaat*.\(^{210, 211}\) Historically, many *jamaats* were safe havens for persecuted groups, such as freed slaves or ethnic Somalis from other countries. In recent times *jamaats* may have inspired the organization of camps of militant Islamists (such as the Wahhabist al-Shabaab organization).\(^{212}\) But these militant groups view the beliefs of Sufi

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\(^{206}\) Bernhard Helander, “Chapter 1: Somalia,” in *Islam Outside the Arab World*, eds. David Westerlund and Ingvar Svanberg (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 44.
tariqa as superstition. They view the worship of saints as adoration and have been known to destroy their graves.  

Salafism, Wahhabism, and Somali Saalixiya Sufism

The Arabic word *salaf* refers to the “righteous ancestors of Islam,” including the Prophet Muhammad and the two generations that followed him. Modern Salafism developed as a return to the Quran, the Sunna (descriptions of Islamic practices based on Muhammad’s example) and the exemplary behavior of the ancestral salaf. In recent centuries, different kinds of Salafism—liberal and conservative, peaceful and militant—have developed throughout the Middle East. In what is today Saudi Arabia, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1766) launched a conservative version of Salafism, called Wahhabism. Al-Wahhab called for the elimination of Shi’a and Sufi Islam as deviant forms of the faith and advocated the strict implementation of shari’a. Influenced by al-Wahhab, Sufi leader Muhammad Salih established a new order on the Arabian Peninsula incorporating Wahhabist teachings. Somali Islamic scholars who traveled to the area for study, encountered the Saalixiya Sufi order and brought back its Salafist-Wahhabist ideas to Somalia. In the early 20th century, Saalixiya Sufism inspired Muhamed Abdullah Hassan, sometimes called the father of Somali nationalism, to resist British, Italian, and Ethiopian colonization. In the latter half of the century, several grassroots Somali Wahhabist and Salafist groups emerged, giving rise to the 1990s group al-Ittihad al-Islamiya, which eventually yielded the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and al-Shabaab.

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Religion and Government

Somali common law, known as heer, governs social relationships at the clan level. The traditions of heer predate Islam. They include solutions for land disputes and compensation for the injury or death of a clan member through a diya-paying group. (Diya is sometimes presented as “blood money.”) Islamic law, or shari’a, has shaped Somali governance for about 1,000 years. Shari’a is the source of most family law, including laws that govern polygamy and divorce. At independence, heer and shari’a were combined with colonial legal practices from Britain and Italy. The 1961 constitution guaranteed freedom of religion, but declared the Somali Republic an Islamic state. Shari’a became applicable in civil and minor penal matters as well as family law, and heer continues to resolve the payment of diya and land and water disputes. After military ruler Mohamed Siad Barre came to power in 1969, he claimed that Islam was compatible with his implementation of socialism. But his unified civil code limited the application of both shari’a and heer, and later eliminated diya payment. His regime dismantled many religious groups and exiled, imprisoned, or executed a number of religious leaders.

Since the fall of the Somali Republic in 1991, clan membership and common law prevail in some regions. In others, shari’a enforcers have become a welcome, if harsh, source of local policing. In addition, militant groups aggressively adopt differing interpretations of Islam. The group Ahlu Sunna wal Jamaa seeks to unite and protect Somalia’s Sufi religious orders, which has led to armed conflict with the Salafist-Wahhabist Islamists of al-Shabaab. Many Somalis do not share al-Shabaab’s extreme vision of an Islamic state.

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Religious Conventions

In Somalia, it is best to avoid the subject of religion in conversation. Somalis will not ask about your religion because they will assume that you are Christian. Be aware that atheism and agnosticism are not well accepted in the Muslim world. Never try to convert a Muslim to another faith.

The Shahada

Many Somalis may not speak Arabic, but they know the Shahada, the profession of faith that is the first pillar of Islam: *Ash-hadu anna la ilaha illa allah, muhammad rasoul allah.* (I testify that there is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God.)

If you speak the words of the Shahada aloud in the presence of Muslims, you will automatically be considered a Muslim. Do not say these words unless you mean them.

The Quran

Treat Islam’s holy book with respect. Do not touch the Qur’an with dirty hands. Keep the Qur’an off the floor. If you are sitting on the floor, hold the Qur’an above your lap or waist. When not in use, protect the Qur’an with a dustcover and do not place anything on top of it. (Muslims keep Qur’anic texts on the highest shelf of a bookcase.) Finally, keep Qur’ans out of latrines.

Religion and Gender

Men dominate women in Somali society, but Somali patrilineal lineage (clan membership through one’s father) and patriarchy (masculine power and authority) are not entirely derived from Islam. It is not always easy to separate Islam from other cultural ideas that shape gender identities, behaviors, and relations in Somalia. The Qur’an does not prohibit education for girls or bar women from earning an income. Shari’a law permits women’s participation in national political public assemblies and conferences (at least according to some Somali sheiks). Nevertheless, Somalis may believe that customs harmful to women, such as female genital mutilation, are justified because they are intrinsically Muslim, and groups like al-Shabaab may

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claim that it is Islam that grants men control over women. Since the fall of the Somali Republic in 1991, the rise of extreme Islamism has resulted in more conservative behavior among many Somali women.

Religious Events and Holidays

Festivities in Somalia are associated with religious, social, and seasonal events. Seasonal events have gained Islamic significance over the centuries. Many religious festivals are connected to the saints recognized by Somali Muslims: saints of Islam, local Somali saints, and founders of different clan lineages.

*Muharram*

It is believed that on the first day of Muharram, the new year of the lunar Muslim calendar, an angel shakes a tree at the boundary between earth and paradise. Each leaf bears an individual Muslim’s name, and the falling leaves indicate the individuals who will die during the year.

*Maulid al-Nabi*

Somalis celebrate the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad on the 12th day of the 3rd month of the lunar calendar. Activities during this and other saints’ birthdays might include animal sacrifices, requests for divine help, and storytelling.

*Ramadan*

Ramadan, the third pillar of Islam, is when Muhammad received his first revelations. Somalia follows the traditions of all Islamic countries for this holy month, the ninth of the lunar calendar. Somali Muslims abstain from food, drink, tobacco, and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset for the entire month. The sick, pregnant and breast-feeding women and children may be exempt, but travelers who cannot keep the fast are expected to fast later. During Ramadan it is considered courteous for non-Muslims to abstain from eating, drinking, and smoking in public during daylight hours.

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Eid al-Fitr

At the end of Ramadan, Muslims break their fast with three days of celebration. People wear new clothes, spend money they have saved during the year, and exchange presents.244

Eid al-Adha

Eid al-Adha is the last holiday of the Islamic year. It follows the return of pilgrims from the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca that is the final pillar of Islam.245 People tell the story of Abraham and Ishmael—of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son for Allah. On this day, Somalis visit the graves of relatives and give food to the less fortunate.246

Roobdoon

Somalis perform this ritual when their lands are threatened by drought.247 Like other Somali rituals, roobdoon may involve public readings of the Qur’an, animal sacrifice, and food donations to the poor.248 Other motivations for group prayer and ritual are preparation for battle or travel and preventing disease or bad fortune predicted by a religious specialist.

Buildings of Worship

The word for mosque in Somali is masjid.249 Unlike other East African mosques, ancient Somali city mosques have minarets, which show a stronger Arabic influence.250 Mosques are important community centers, housing schools as well as areas for worship.251 The first women’s mosque in Somalia was established in Gabiley, Somaliland, in the 1970s.252

Behavior in Buildings of Worship

Non-Muslims can enter a mosque, but should obtain permission before doing so. Contact the imam (a religious elder), a sheik, or another person in charge of the premises. That person might say Ha ga-lin (Do not enter) or Muslim oo keli ah! (Only Muslims can enter!)

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**Exchange 2: At the Mosque**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Would you permit me to enter the mosque?</th>
<th>ma ee oglaan kartaa eenaan so galo masaajidka?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheik:</td>
<td>No. It is only for Muslims.</td>
<td>maaya, muslim o keli-aa baa lo oguliya.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exchange 3: Into the Mosque**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Would you permit me to enter the mosque?</th>
<th>ma ee oglaan kartaa eenaan so galo masaajidka?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheik:</td>
<td>Yes, but you must remove your shoes.</td>
<td>haa, laakeen marka hore kabaaha iska seeb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>Thank you.</td>
<td>mahadsanid.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once you are inside the mosque, you must not touch certain objects. Do not touch any artifacts and do not touch the walls, especially the north wall, where people direct their prayers. Most mosques have a shrine in one corner. Do not touch it.

Do not speak unless you are spoken to, and even then, speak in a whisper. Do not interrupt a person while he is praying. Do not walk in front of a person who is praying because this invalidates the prayer and may upset the person. These rules apply to prayer inside and outside the mosque.

When Sunnis pray, they begin by standing up straight and placing their hands on their abdomen. (Shi’a Muslims begin praying by placing their hands on their sides.) You may see men handling what look like rosary beads, but this does not mean that they are praying. Somali men, like Arab men of all religions, carry these beads.

Men and women attend mosque separately. Somali women wear a head scarf or veil to mosque. Men are not required to cover their head, but may wear a small cap (in Somali, *benadiry kufia*) to Friday prayers.
Chapter 2 Assessment

1. As an Islamic state, the Somali Republic operated exclusively under shari’a law.
   False
   The early government combined Somali common law (heer), shari’a, and colonial legal practices. Siad Barre’s government later restricted the application of both heer and shari’a.

2. The Qur’an prohibits formal education for girls.
   False
   Although the Qur’an does not bar girls from pursuing an education, Somalis may believe that Islam discourages education for girls.

3. Somalis are said to be descended from Samaal, the biblical Ham, son of Noah
   True
   Somalis commemorate Abraham’s sacrifice and believe they descend from a son of Noah. But they also believe that Allah’s last revelations came to Muhammad as recorded in the Qur’an.

4. Somalis believe that tariqa religious leaders have baraka, the spiritual power to grant blessings or bring harm.
   True
   The leaders of tariqa, Sufi religious orders, may retain this power after death, becoming saints.

5. Roobdoon is an Islamic holiday that marks the birthing season of livestock.
   False
   Roobdoon is a Somali ritual that involves asking for rain to end drought. It may incorporate public readings of the Qur’an.
CHAPTER 3: TRADITIONS

Introduction

Many Somali traditions are related to clans and associations with the land. Most Somalis are rural dwellers, primarily nomadic herders, although some are settled agro-pastoralists, who engage in mixed farming and herding. When towns and other permanent settlements emerged, traditions of communal worship and land and property rights developed. Both farmers and nomadic pastoralists developed traditions of market trade and social events related to the seasons. Nomadic pastoralism encouraged habits of self-reliance and frontier justice. Somali nomadic pastoral clans (the Dir, Daarood, Isaaq, and Hawiye) came to view themselves as freer, braver, and superior to the settled agro-pastoral clans (the Digil and Rahanwiin). Yet the six clans together placed themselves above outsiders: people who have been excluded from clan membership by occupation (leather and metal workers, barbers, circumcisers), ethnicity (Bantu, people of the Gosha), or a history of slavery.253, 254, 255

In contemporary Somalia, people who look different continue to suffer discrimination. Because these people are unarmed and unrelated to a major clan, they have been especially vulnerable to the violence of Somalia’s long civil war.256 Somalis are mistrustful of outsiders, particularly white people, who are associated with colonialism.257 It is best to be cautious in any interaction. Somalis are likely to remain loyal to their ethnic group or clan above the interests of an outsider.

Honor and Values

Somalis value freedom, equality, loyalty, generosity, and the wisdom of tradition.258, 259 In Somali society, personal freedom and equality are constrained by family and clan loyalty. When Somalis act according to their values, outside observers may see them as independent, anarchic, untrustworthy, and cruel.

Many Somali values are reflected in Arab culture. It is

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difficult to say whether Arab notions about family honor, patrilineality, and patriarchy were introduced into Somalia or whether similar Somali ideas already existed.

Somalis live by the saying: “My brother and I against my half-brother, my brother and I against my father, my father’s household against my uncle’s household, our two households (my uncle’s and mine) against the rest of the immediate kin, the immediate kin against non-immediate members of the clan, my clan against other clans, and, finally, my nation and I against the world.” Close family members traditionally give help and receive protection in times of trouble. Yet family and clan relationships are full of conflict that may lead to violence, including murder and revenge killing. The traditions of *heer*, Somali common law, make all members of a clan-based group collectively responsible for the actions of an individual member. A group may seek to avenge a member’s murder by killing someone—anyone—from the enemy clan of the murderer. *Heer* provides a way to end revenge killing. The enemy group may end the dispute by paying *diya*, or “blood money” compensation, to members of the injured group. Disagreement about a fair amount of *diya* often leads to continued retaliation, as does the changing membership of *diya*-paying groups.

**Rifles**

A Somali man is traditionally a *waranleh* (warrior). For centuries, Somali men have fought over water, camels, women, and land. Since the collapse of the republic, a generation of Somalis has grown up in an era of lawlessness. Thus, many Somalis are adept at close-range rifle combat. Most families own at least one rifle.

In the following exchange, the soldier asks the Somali to surrender his weapon temporarily while on coalition grounds or passing through a checkpoint. But a Somali man should not be expected to give up his rifle willingly. He owns his rifle to protect his home and family, and keeping it is a question of honor. He will not give it up unless an agreement is reached through consensus.

**Exchange 4: Surrender your weapon.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Are you carrying weapons?</th>
<th>hub meeyaad sidataa?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>Yes, I am.</td>
<td>haa, waan sitaa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>Please surrender your weapon, and you may enter.</td>
<td>waa inaad eeska deebtaa hubka, kadib sogal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Patriarchy**

Somali tradition places greater value on males than on females. A girl’s birth is celebrated with one animal’s sacrifice, a boy’s birth with two. Clan membership is patrilineal, or acquired through the father’s line. Revenge killing is rare for a murdered woman, but obligatory for a

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murdered man. *Diya* compensation for the death of a male is twice the amount paid for a female.\(^{265}\) Some Somali traditions result in more harm to females than to males. Almost all Somali children are circumcised, but girls undergo infibulation, an extreme form of female genital mutilation. The procedure’s origins are disputed, but may be related to traditions of family honor.\(^{266}\)

**Codes of Politeness**

**Greetings**

The most common way of greeting another person is with the Arabic phrase *as salaamu 'alaykum*.

**Exchange 5: Peace be upon you.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Peace be upon you.</th>
<th>as salaamu 'alaykum.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>And upon you be peace.</td>
<td>wa 'alaykum a salaam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>How are you (all)?</td>
<td>maHaa la sheygey?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>Fine, thank you.</td>
<td>waa la fee’an yahey, mahadsanid.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The morning greeting to another person usually includes expressing good wishes for the upcoming day.

**Exchange 6: Good morning.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Good morning.</th>
<th>subaH wanagsin.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>Good morning.</td>
<td>SubaH wanagsin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>Today is going to be a good day.</td>
<td>maanta maalin wanagsin bey nokon dontaa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>Hopefully.</td>
<td>waan racheyneynaa inshaa alaah.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A friendly comment or question (such as talking about the weather) follows the greetings to keep the conversation going.

**Exchange 7: Good afternoon.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Good afternoon.</th>
<th>galab wanagsin.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>Good afternoon.</td>
<td>galab wanagsin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>Is tonight going to be a cool night?</td>
<td>'aawaa ma habeyn kaboo bey nokon dontaa?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>Yes, thank God.</td>
<td>haa, waa ilaah mahedees.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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After greeting someone you have never met, it is common to ask the person’s name.

### Exchange 8: What’s your name?

| Soldier: | What’s your name? | adeegoo maga'aa? |
| Somali:  | My name is Hassan. | maga'eygu waa Hasan. |
| Soldier: | I’m pleased to meet you, Hassan. | waan koo faraHsan-ahaay eenaan koo barto, Hasan. |
| Somali:  | Me too! | aneegana seedo kaley! |

### Appropriate Language

Many Somalis are familiar with American slang words. For this reason, one should avoid using obscene or indecent language within earshot of Somalis. They will understand and take offense.

### Exchange 9: It is forbidden to use foul language.

| Somali: | It is forbidden to use foul language in public. | waa mamnoo' inaad mer fegaare-aa hadar 'aay-aa koo hadasho. |
| Soldier: | Thank you for telling me. | sheygitaan-kaaga waad koo mahadsan tahaay. |

### Social Interaction and Communication Style

The spoken word is highly valued, and Somalis strive to have a strong command of speech. Conversations begin with small talk, which gives Somalis time to make a first impression. Telling jokes is a welcome part of conversation. By using humor, Somalis keep their conversations light, thereby preventing someone from losing face. Somalis appreciate oral poetry, stories, speeches, and songs. Conversations are sprinkled with proverbs, poems, and indirect references.

Somalis use broad gestures to emphasize speech. Gestures incorporate the full hand, not a single finger. A swift twist of the open hand means “nothing” or “no.” Snapping fingers may mean “long ago” or “and so on.” A thumb under the chin indicates “fullness.” Many common American gestures, such as making the A-OK sign or thumbs-up sign, are considered offensive.

### Eye Contact

In American culture, breaking eye contact may be construed as insincerity. But in Somalia, breaking eye contact is a cultural trait that does not imply rudeness, ill will, or concealment of the truth. It is not appropriate for a male soldier to stare at Somali women.

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**Touching**

During conversation, Somalis of the same gender stand close together, less than an arm’s length apart. Members of the same gender often display friendly affection in public. Somali men may embrace each other, place their hands on each other’s shoulders, and walk down the street holding hands. Somali women may exchange similar gestures of affection. This is a sign of kinship or friendship, not homosexuality.® Somali society has zero tolerance for homosexuality.® In fact, the subject of sexuality should be avoided entirely. If you are asked about yourself, you might answer that this is a personal matter and you would prefer not to discuss it.

**Male-Female Interaction**

Somalis of the opposite sex do not touch in public. Husband and wife may walk side by side, but holding hands is avoided. Adults commonly socialize apart, men in tea or coffee shops and women in one another’s homes.® Young men and women meet at traditional gatherings and events, such as weddings and harvest festivals. Men and women work in separate spheres. From an early age, girls help their mothers with housework and have little time to play or attend school with their brothers.

**Hospitality and Gifts**

When Somalis have a visitor, they do not discuss anything with the guest while the person is outside or standing. The guest is asked to enter the home and be seated. Somalis then serve something—even if they have only water to offer. It is customary to graciously accept a small amount of whatever is offered and to say *mahadsanid* (thank you).

While an American host may offer a plate of food and allow guests to serve themselves, a Somali host serves the food using his or her right hand. It is customary to accept what is served with the right hand. In fact, the right hand should always be used in any sort of interaction involving hands. The left hand is reserved for personal hygiene and is considered unclean.

When a Somali family invites someone into their home and offers a seat, the person should not sit with crossed legs. To do so is considered rude. In general, the bottoms of shoes or feet are never shown. Doing so is considered an insult.

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Exchanging Gifts

Somalis are not likely to give or expect to receive presents unless there is a special connection between the two parties. Still, it is best to be prepared to give a gift in the event that one is offered. The gift need not be expensive; the recipient will not necessarily open the gift in front of you.

**Exchange 10: Oh, you shouldn’t have.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Somali:</th>
<th>This is for you.</th>
<th>adeega ken iskaa leh.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>You shouldn’t have.</td>
<td>ma ahayn inaad ee keyntid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>It’s just a little thing.</td>
<td>waa waH iyar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>Thank you.</td>
<td>mahadsanid.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If someone admires something a Somali owns, the person may want to give the article to the admirer. Therefore, care should be taken with compliments. If this rule is forgotten and a possession is subsequently offered, it is appropriate to say “thank you” and politely refuse. A Somali may offer the item two more times. It is best to refuse, politely and graciously, all three times.

**Exchange 11: Shirt off his back.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Your shirt is nice.</th>
<th>shaakaagu woo fee'aa yahey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>Please accept it, it’s yours.</td>
<td>fadlan eegaa ogolo, adeegaa iskaa le.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>No, thank you, it’s yours.</td>
<td>maaya, mahadsanid, adeegaa iskaa le.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eating Habits

Islam forbids the consumption of alcohol and pork, and meat must be xalaal (slaughtered in accordance with Islamic food purity standards).\(^{276}\) Traditional nomads consider fishing a lowly activity. Fish consumption is common only in coastal towns.\(^{277},^{278}\)

Food is traditionally served without utensils. A bowl of water is usually provided for washing hands before and after a meal. Somalis use the right hand to eat, refrain from touching their fingers to their lips while eating, and eat from the part of the communal serving bowl that is directly in front of them. Men, women, and children eat separately, and guests are served larger portions. Overeating is considered impolite and unacceptable.\(^{279}\)

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\(^{276}\) Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi, *Culture and Customs of Somalia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 111.
\(^{278}\) Barlin Ali, *Somali Cuisine* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2007), x.
**Beverages**

Because Somalis usually drink only tea, it is not appropriate to ask for coffee when tea is served. Somalis like to make tea with sugar, so it is generally rather sweet.²⁸⁰ It is acceptable to ask for more sugar or milk. Somalis signal that they do not want a second cup by moving their cup away from the person who is serving so that it cannot be refilled.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exchange 12: Have some tea.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali host/ friend:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier/guest:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Khat**

Somali men traditionally purchase fresh leaves of the khat (in Somali, *qaad*) plant at morning markets to chew in the afternoon.²⁸¹ According to a U.S. narcotics and law enforcement bureau, khat gives “a mild amphetamine-like high, manifesting in excitement, euphoria, and suppressed appetite.”²⁸² The use of khat in the morning—to eradicate the previous afternoon’s khat *qaadiro* (hangover)—has been recently observed.²⁸³ Khat is a controlled substance in the United States. Do not accept invitations to join a khat party. American service members are prohibited from using khat.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exchange 13: This is khat.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Dress Codes**

Somali men wear Western pants or a kilt-like *ma’aawii* (similar to an Indonesian sarong), Western shirts, and shawls. They may wrap a colorful turban around their head or wear a *benadiry kufia* (snug-fitting, embroidered cap).²⁸⁴, ²⁸⁵

Somali women wear brightly colored, full-length dresses such as the *guntiino* (similar to an Indian sari), which is wrapped around the body and tied over one shoulder.²⁸⁶ The *dirac*, a

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long, billowing dress worn over a petticoat, is a more recent style from Djibouti, and the *toob* (a loose cloth wrapped around the body, but with the face visible) is common throughout the Arab world.  

The rise of extreme Islamism, as seen in Wahhabism-influenced al-Shabaab, has resulted in more conservative dress. Somalis in communities occupied by this insurgent group wear heavier fabrics, darker colors, and more voluminous scarves and shawls.

**General Rules of Dress**

Conservative attire is highly recommended when visiting Somalia. Men should avoid wearing shorts and should never remove their shirts, even in hot, humid weather. Women should dress in a modest manner that does not attract attention, avoiding tight, revealing clothes like shorts and miniskirts.

**Nonreligious Traditional Events**

In addition to gathering for Islamic holidays, Somalis gather for various other occasions. Plays and storytelling are popular pastimes. Rites of passage mark life events such as childhood circumcision, engagement and marriage, and death. The *hus* remembers one’s ancestors with a feast where animals are sacrificed, and the meat is distributed among relatives and the poor. It is believed that these sacrifices reach ancestors in the afterlife.

Traditional festivities mark seasonal events important to herders and farmers. *Dab-shid*, the Festival of Fire, falls on 27 or 28 July and marks the beginning of the Somali solar year. Although Islam influenced Somalia with the use the lunar calendar, the solar calendar is also used to time crop production and animal husbandry. During this festival, people build bonfires and perform dances. *Dab-shid*, also called *Neeroosh*, is probably a holdover of ancient Persian fire and sun worship.

**Exchange 14: Dab-shid**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>What is this procession about?</th>
<th>maHaa halkan ka jira?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>Today is Dab-shid.</td>
<td>manta waa dab shid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>Thank you.</td>
<td>mahadsanid.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Processions

Processions may be a part of rituals that involve celebration, remembrance, or appeasement, such as the *Roobdoon* rainmaking ritual.\(^{294}\) If a procession approaches, it is appropriate to stand back and show respect as it passes by.

**Exchange 15: What’s this procession all about?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>What is this procession about?</th>
<th>maHaa halkan ka jira.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>Today is Roobdoon.</td>
<td>manta waa robdon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>Thank you.</td>
<td>mahadsanid.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Firing Rifles

In some parts of Somalia, people may fire rifles in celebration of the birth of a baby, a battle victory, or a wedding. This aspect of contemporary Somali life originated in nomadic Arab culture.

**Exchange 16: Why are they firing their weapons?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>What is all this firing about?</th>
<th>maHaa da’aay o Habadaha lo ridiyaa?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>We have a wedding going on.</td>
<td>waHaa chira aros.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dos and Don’ts

**Do** expect a warm greeting from someone of the same gender who befriends you. Somalis of the same gender greet each other warmly with handshakes or by placing their right hand over their heart.

**Do** use your entire hand when gesturing.

**Do** keep your feet on the ground and your soles hidden when sitting.

**Don’t** use your left hand for eating or greeting.

**Don’t** shake hands with someone of the opposite sex.

**Don’t** use your index finger to beckon someone. This gesture is used for summoning dogs.

**Don’t** point a finger at anyone. Use your entire right hand instead.

**Don’t** use gestures such as the A-OK sign or the thumbs-up sign. They are considered offensive.

**Don’t** make a fist, bend your arm upward, and clasp your bicep with your other hand. This gesture is considered obscene.

Chapter 3 Assessment

1. Telling jokes is a welcome part of conversation. 
   **True**  
   By using humor, Somalis keep their conversations light, thereby preventing someone from losing face.

2. People who are unrelated to one of Somalia’s major clans have been especially vulnerable to the violence of Somalia’s long civil war.  
   **True**  
   In addition to lacking protection from affiliation with a major clan, these people are often unarmed.

3. For men, shorts are an acceptable alternative to the traditional *ma’aawii* (sarong), as long as they are loose-fitting.  
   **False**  
   Men should avoid wearing shorts and should also refrain from taking off their shirts, even in hot, humid weather.

4. Somalis of the same gender do not touch in public.  
   **False**  
   Somali friends or relatives of the same gender often embrace or hold hands in public. Somalis of the opposite sex—even spouses—do not.

5. Somalis gesture with their hands, but rarely point with a single finger.  
   **True**  
   Pointing or beckoning with one finger is considered rude. Somalis use the entire hand when gesturing to others.
CHAPTER 4: URBAN LIFE

Introduction

An image sometimes associated with Somalia is of a nomadic family herding camels in a desert. Yet, for a thousand years or more, Somalia has been home to cities. Trading ports line the coasts. The seats of historic kingdoms, colonies, and self-declared states lie in interior locations supplied with sufficient water. In recent decades, an image of contemporary urban Somalia has emerged—the bomb-flattened, corpse-strewn streets of Mogadishu. Yet, urban life continues in Mogadishu and elsewhere.295 The urban population is growing as hundreds of thousands of people flee into cities to escape droughts, floods, or armed conflict.296 The “instant” cities of refugee camps—located in areas that lack infrastructure—have urban-sized needs for water, food, shelter, healthcare, and security.

The Somali Republic (1960–91) defined an urban area as any area with social amenities (such as a public square, a mosque, a school, a market, or a hospital) and a local government (including regional and district capitals, regardless of their population).297 In some small towns, the square served as the marketplace, and government administration was the main occupation.298

Large cities reflect their international origins and colonial pasts. For example, Mogadishu’s Benadiri population, sometimes referred to as “people of Mogadishu (Reer Xamar),” descend from Arab, Persian, and Bantu ancestors who brought trading, weaving, and fishing to the city. Italians later made Mogadishu their colonial capital, shaping its laws, schools, architecture, and cuisine, as did the British in Hargeysa.

Urban homes, often protected by high walls topped with broken glass, may have electricity and running water. Socializing takes place at tea shops, entertainments, or nightclubs.299 High population densities support post-republic businesses such as private electricity plants, hospitals, and mobile phone companies.300

Urbanization Issues

Somalia’s cities are dangerous. Their growth rate is double that of rural areas, underscoring the desperation that famine and conflict have caused throughout the country. People come to cities to find food aid and to lose the clan-based identities that mark them for death. Aid agencies, however, are not able to meet all the needs of growing urban populations. Clan-based conflict has become urban warfare not only in Mogadishu—where warlords compete for international media attention—but in other cities with strategic value, such as Kismaayo. In stateless Somalia, security seems to be the single urban issue that drives all others.

The unregulated Somalia environment makes meeting other challenges of urbanization even more difficult. Urban insecurity drives up the costs and risks of business, governance, and relief efforts. Infrastructure, from electricity plants to mobile telecommunications, develops without coordination (if at all), which creates inefficiencies. Water, air, and garbage pollution grow unchecked. Income inequality is sharply defined and the urban poor are worse off than their rural counterparts. Migrants from rural areas encounter unexpectedly high living costs.


They rent housing, rather than own, buy water instead of collecting it for free, and pay high prices for food instead of growing their own. In 2011, nearly 600,000 urban residents were in crisis; at the end of that year, 178,000 lived in famine conditions.

**Work Problems in Urban Areas**

East African cities, built by European colonists, depended on the labor of unaccompanied males who migrated between family homesteads and temporary urban work quarters. These quarters were usually in city slums. Working men, without their families, tended to live in clan-based groups. This pattern was amplified in Somalia when local militias took control of many available jobs after the collapse of the republic in 1991. Urban unemployment continues to be fueled by young men coming to cities to look for work.

Families that come to the city are faced with restrictions on their traditional subsistence practices of gardening, farming, and sheep or goat tending. Educated women may find employment as teachers or nurses. Most poor urbanites make a living as part-time traders, service workers, or artisanal manufacturers in the large informal economy. Urban unemployment rates exceeded 61% in 2002.

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Health Issues

The health situation in Somalia is one of the worst in Africa, although there has been some improvement. In 2011, the average life expectancy was 51 years, up from 47 years in 2009.\(^323, 324\) Overall, city dwellers are better off than rural populations because of improved drinking water, sanitation services, and availability of professional medical care.\(^325\) But the urban poor, lacking access to these improvements, are more likely to suffer from diseases such as cholera, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS.\(^326\) There are also regional differences in healthcare. The less war-ridden north has been more accessible for aid and development than the violent south.\(^327, 328\) Doctors Without Borders (MSF) pulled out of the Hodan district of Mogadishu after two staff members were killed at the end of 2011.\(^329\)

Health-related concerns in urban areas include men’s use of the drug khat and women’s susceptibility to abuse.\(^330, 331\) Khat chewing causes short-term alertness and euphoria, often followed by depression, irritability, loss of appetite, and difficulty sleeping. Adverse effects of habitual use may include tooth decay and periodontal disease, gastrointestinal disorders, cardiovascular problems, and the worsening of mental illness.\(^332\)

Women and girls, particularly migrants first learning to negotiate an urban area or a densely populated refugee camp, may be threatened with gang rape if they fail to exchange sex for permission to pass checkpoints or other services.\(^333, 334\)

**Education**

In the precolonial past, education in Somali cities began with traditions of Islamic learning in Zeila, Mogadishu, and Brava. In the 19th century, European colonists established schools to train administrative workers. Italian remained a language of instruction in higher education through the 1970s, and Arabic and English continue to be languages of instruction at all educational levels. The Somali Republic never had the budget to provide primary and secondary education countrywide, but cities developed schools, colleges, and universities, both Qur’anic and Western, largely attended by boys and young men. State-supported education began to deteriorate in the 1980s, and virtually ceased during the worst years of the civil war. In the 1990s, educational institutions began to reopen in areas with strong local participation, typically aided by Arab and Islamic charities.

Education, like healthcare, is more established in the north than in the south. According to recent estimates, less than one-third of children in Somalia attend school. But in the self-proclaimed Republic of Somaliland, situated in the northwest, about a third of the girls and almost two-thirds of the boys go to primary school. In an effort to boost enrollment, the Somaliland government introduced free primary and secondary education in 2011.

**Food**

Local meat, fish (along the coast), and imported rice are staple foods in urban areas. Pasta, of Italian colonial origin, is a popular change from rice, especially with marinara sauce. Breakfast might consist of flour or millet pancakes, lunch might be rice or millet with milk and ghee.
(clarified butter), and for supper a snack of milk or cooked beans. In restaurants, different international cuisines are available. Wine, beer, and locally made rum are also served.\footnote{343 CultureGrams World Edition, “Somalia: Diet,” 2012, 6.}

*Sharing Food*

If you are eating a snack or a meal and Somali children or men are nearby, it is a kind gesture to offer them some of your food. If you offer the food only once, they will probably decline.

**Exchange 17: Please have some food.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Please have some food.</th>
<th>Hogaa 'un walaal!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>No thanks.</td>
<td>Mahadsanid.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But if you offer the food a second or even a third time, the Somalis might smile and accept your offer.

**Exchange 18: You have to eat!**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Please have some food. You have to eat some!</th>
<th>so freesu, waa in aad Hogaa 'untaa!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>Thank you very much.</td>
<td>aad baad u mahadsan tahaay.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Markets and Street Vendors**


**Exchange 19: Where is the market?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Where is the market?</th>
<th>sooka waa Hagay?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>The market is down that street and to the left.</td>
<td>sooka waa, marka lagoo dego chidkan dina'eesa bidiH.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>Please show me.</td>
<td>fadlan ee tus.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Somalia is a world-renowned producer of frankincense and fabric. Somalis also trade a variety of animal products, such as ghee (clarified butter), leather, feathers, and shells.

**Exchange 20: What are you selling?**


Somali:  Please try it. It’s 100 shillings.  
fadlan teechaabee waa bokol sheelin.

Soldier:  Here you go, thank you.  
waakan waad mahadsan tahaay.

Food offered to you by someone you know and trust is probably safe. But beware of food from street vendors.

**Exchange 21: Would you buy something sweet?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Somali vendor:</th>
<th>Buy some sweets? They are delicious!</th>
<th>eebso Hogaa ma’ ma’aan ah? aad bey oo fee'an tahaay!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>Thank you, they sure look great.</td>
<td>waad mahadsan tahaay, waHoy oo eg tahaay waH fee'an.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Traffic and Transportation**

Rush-hour traffic jams in Mogadishu are more than just an annoyance. They can be deadly. If a fight breaks out between two groups, innocent people can become trapped. It is advisable to remove yourself from such a situation quickly and remain as polite as possible. Obscene language can be counterproductive. (Many Somalis understand English four-letter words.) It is more effective to use polite, respectful language.

**Exchange 22: Traffic Commands**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Please give way!</th>
<th>fadlan jid i see!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>Hold on, please!</td>
<td>fadlan is sug!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>Please, pull over!</td>
<td>fadlan jidka ka baH!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>What for?</td>
<td>sababtu waa maHaay?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>Please, let the military vehicle pass.</td>
<td>fadlan oo baaney baaboorta 'iidamadu iney gudbaan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Gathering Information**

Somalis seeking jobs, medical attention, or police assistance sometimes show up at coalition facilities. They might also be selling food or souvenirs. In most cases, the guard must redirect them or turn them away politely and respectfully. But if people come with information about insurgents, follow the procedures given to you by your commander.
### Exchange 23: I saw insurgents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Thank you. Please stay here.</th>
<th>mahadsanid, fadlan halkan see ju.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>I saw some insurgents hiding in that house.</td>
<td>waHaan arkey moriyaan iskoo karinayaan gureegaas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Exchange 24: When did they come?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>When did the insurgents arrive?</th>
<th>moriyaanta gormey bey yimaaden?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>They came here yesterday.</td>
<td>shaley bey yimaaden.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>When did they leave?</td>
<td>gormey bey baHen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>They left today.</td>
<td>maanta ayey baHen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Exchange 25: Which village did the insurgents come from?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Which village did the insurgents come from?</th>
<th>tooladey bey moriyaanta ke yimaaden.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>They came from a village in the East.</td>
<td>waHaay ke yimaaden toolo ku taala bareyga.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>Point to it on this map please.</td>
<td>fadlan eega tilmaan maabka.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 4 Assessment

1. Peoples from Asia, Africa, and Europe all contributed to the development of Somalia’s cities. 
   **True**
   The cities of Somalia evolved from a mix of people with a wide range of histories, ethnic backgrounds, and political allegiances.

2. If a Somali has refused to share your food when it is first offered, it is rude to make repeated offers.
   **False**
   It is common practice for Somalis to reject an offer at first, but to accept food on the third offer.

3. Urban traffic jams in Mogadishu can be a security risk.
   **True**
   Rush-hour traffic jams in Mogadishu can be deadly. People can become trapped if a fight breaks out between two groups. It is advisable to extricate yourself from such a traffic jam quickly and remain as polite as possible.

4. Most urban Somalis trade at markets on a regular basis.
   **True**
   Trade is at least a part-time occupation for almost everyone in Somalia. It is the main occupation in cities and towns.

5. Migrants from the countryside are accustomed to the difficult conditions they encounter in cities.
   **False**
   Migrants from rural areas are often unprepared for the difficulties they encounter in urban areas. They must rent housing, rather than own their homes, buy water instead of collecting it for free, and pay high prices for food instead of growing their own.
CHAPTER 5: RURAL LIFE

Introduction

Rural life in Somalia centers around herding livestock across thousands of miles of dry lands, raising crops near rivers or seasonal springs, or a combination of both. Nearly two-thirds of the Somali population live in rural areas. Yet recent estimates show a decline in the rural population, and Somalia’s rate of urbanization is outpacing the population growth rate. Sparse populations make rural dwellers gracious to guests and socially and economically self-reliant. Because of scarce resources, rural Somalis make the most of what there is and often compete for control of land, water, or other natural resources.

Somali Clan Structure

Almost all Somalis are born into a clan, a kin group based on paternal descent. Those who are not kin often find another way to affiliate themselves with a major clan family. Clan membership provides a social identity and a support system and eventually creates clan-based responsibilities to others. There are several levels of membership: clan family (the largest group), clan, subclan, primary lineage, and diya-paying group. This last unit is made up of a few lineages who share a common ancestor and who join together to pay compensation for injuries if necessary. The organization of these groups is fluid, with alliances typically changing, and temporary coalitions forming. For example, competing or argumentative primary lineages within a subclan regularly cause subclans to split into new groups. These characteristics of establishing a kinship and clan-based society applies mostly to Somalia’s nomadic population. Somalis who settle into a less nomadic way of life may develop social identities based on place of residence and support systems rooted in mixed-clan, multicultural communities.

Somalis believe that they share a common ancestry with two brothers, Samaal and Sab, whose descendants founded today’s clan families. Most Somalis trace their descent from Samaal, who was a herder, and belong to a subgroup of one of the nomadic herder clan families: the Dir,

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Daarood, Isaaq, or Hawiye. Those Somalis who are descended from Sab, a farmer, belong to one of the farmer-herder clan families, the Rahanwiin or Digil. Researchers note that the status of the Isaaq as a clan family is contested, with some Somalis viewing them as part of the Dir.\(^{350, 351}\) Similarly, the Rahanwiin clan family may be a recent creation intended to give farming communities political power.\(^{352, 353}\) Relationships among clans, subclans, and lineages are also often in dispute.

Be aware that some Somalis may consider it disrespectful or even dangerous to discuss their culture in terms of clan or tribe.\(^{354}\) These Western designations may carry connotations of colonial racism. In addition, for Somalis, admission of membership in a specific group could make someone a target of attack.

Although much of Somalia’s non-Somali population lives in Mogadishu and other cities, there are also rural groups of non-Somalis who live “hidden” by the dominance of nomadic clan politics. They hunt, farm, fish, and trade.\(^{355, 356}\)

**Land Distribution**

The four main Samaale clan families—Daarood, Hawiye, Isaaq, and Dir—are traditionally concerned with land and water rights for their camels, cattle, and other livestock. They follow their herds throughout the Horn of Africa, across neighboring clan territories and into neighboring countries.\(^{357}\) The Dir clan family, including the Issa and Gadabursi clans, are concentrated in the Awdal (Adal) region of northwest Somalia and extend into Djibouti and Ethiopia. Some Dir also live along the southern coast between Mogadishu and Kismaayo.\(^{358}\) The Isaaq clan family live mostly in northern Somalia and are the primary inhabitants of the self-proclaimed Republic of

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\(^{353}\) Harun Hassan and Cedric Barnes, “A Return to Clan-Politics (or Worse) in Southern Somalia?” Crisis in the Horn of Africa, Social Science Research Council, 27 March 2007, [http://hornofafrica.ssrc.org/Hassan_Barnes/](http://hornofafrica.ssrc.org/Hassan_Barnes/)


\(^{356}\) UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “A Study on Minorities in Somalia,” ReliefWeb, 1 August 2002, [http://reliefweb.int/node/106591](http://reliefweb.int/node/106591)


Somaliland. The Daarood clan family range from northeastern Somalia through eastern Ethiopia and southwest into Kenya. The Daarood clans that came to dominate the Barre government were known as the MOD (Mareehaan-Ogaadeen-Dulbahante—the name of Siad Barre’s clan, his mother’s clan, and his son-in-law’s clan, respectively). The Mareehaan and Ogaadeen are concentrated in southern Somalia, the Dulbahante in the north. Rival Daarood clans, in particular the Majeerteen clan, opposed Barre from the end of the Ogaden War in the late 1970s and later established Puntland’s autonomy. The Hawiye clan family live in the south-central region of Somalia. To the west, many Hawiye live in Ethiopia and Kenya. To the east, Hawiye territory includes Mogadishu, where its Abgaal and Habar Gedir clans are dominant. Toward the end of the 1980s, the MOD challenged Hawiye dominance in the capital, which resulted in an increased number of saboteurs and snipers in the city. In recent years, different Hawiye clans have allied themselves with the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and al-Shabaab and, thus, against one another.

The Sab clan families—the Digil and Rahanwiin—live in southern Somalia between the Juba and the Shabelle rivers. Because of the availability of water for farming, the region supports higher population densities and settlements. These groups had little involvement in the clan conflicts of the 1980s, but found themselves defenseless against the food raids of Hawiye and Daarood groups during the famine of 1991–92. Since then, they have developed armed forces of their own in an attempt to secure their lands.

Minority populations of Bantu farmers and coastal fishers live in the south. Population displacement caused by famine and war has redistributed traditional clan-based groups throughout Somalia.

Economy

Somalia’s rural herders and farmers create a subsistence economy, producing only enough to support themselves. Pastoralists trade animal products, from milk to leather, for the output of farmers, from food to cloth. Rural Somalis also harvest other resources, such as frankincense, myrrh, gum arabic, and wood charcoal, for trade or sale whenever possible. Colonial administrations and the early Somali Republic tried to settle many nomads, with mixed success. Drought and war have been more effective in moving herders toward settled life, whether on farms or in refugee camps or cities. In the agricultural south, landless farmworkers were once slaves of Somali pastoral clans and, later, field hands on Italian plantations. In the decades of civil war, men armed with guns have made a living by plundering unprotected rural settlements. Piracy reportedly attracts unemployed rural youth with the promise of USD 10,000 or more for participation in a single successful hijacking.

Rural Transportation

Camels are the most reliable means of transportation in most of rural Somalia. Shepherds, farmers, refugees, and insurgents also use donkeys and other pack animals to move belongings and transport themselves. In secure areas (and in peaceful times), passenger minivans and cargo trucks move people and goods between major towns. Of Somalia’s 22,100 km (13,732 mi) of roads, only 2,608 km (1,620 mi) are paved. Unpaved roads are usually impassable during the rainy season. Only 7 of Somalia’s 59 airports have paved runways, and just 4 of those are longer than 3,000 m (9,843 ft). Along the coast, Arabic-style dhows (boats) are used for trade and fishing, as they have been for centuries. Modern pirates have confiscated fishing boats and other larger vessels to use as mother ships from which they launch flat-bottomed boats with large outboard motors, known as skiffs.
Rural Healthcare

According to statistics from the World Health Organization (WHO), rural areas are the least served in Somalia’s failing healthcare system. In the past 15 years, access to drinkable water and sanitation facilities has reached 60% in urban areas, but in rural areas has declined to virtually nothing. Even though urban women and children receive better healthcare, the under-5 mortality rate remains about the same for both rural and urban populations, which is the highest in the world.\(^{374,375}\) Malnutrition is widespread, increasingly so in southern areas where insurgents interfere with humanitarian aid organizations.\(^ {376,377}\) The UN’s 2012 Consolidated Appeal for Somalia estimated that about 2.5 million rural inhabitants are in severe need of food assistance, including 75,000 people suffering from famine.\(^ {378}\) Aid agencies plan to target food assistance to rural and refugee households headed by women, a growing phenomenon in Somalia.\(^ {379}\)

The traditional Somali religious figure, the wadad, is also a healer and often the nearest medical practitioner in rural settings.\(^ {380}\) Traditional healers specialize in different areas. The spiritual healer treats problems such as spirit possession and the evil eye. Other practitioners specialize in bonesetting, herb use, bloodletting, cauterization, circumcision, and midwifery.\(^ {381,382}\)

The Evil Eye

Many Somalis believe in the evil eye. According to this belief, someone can be given the evil eye by a purposeful or accidental gaze from an envious or admiring person. Harm then comes to the person being praised or admired. For example, suppose a Western healthcare professional tells an expectant mother that her baby is big and healthy. A Westerner might interpret this as good news, but a Somali mother may fear that some harm will come to her baby as a result of

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such praise.\footnote{383 Toby Lewis et al., “Somali Cultural Profile: Traditional Medical Practices,” Ethnomed, 2012, \url{http://ethnomed.org/culture/somali/somali-cultural-profile}} A popular belief in Islamic culture is that one should not admire something or compliment someone without using the expression \textit{ma shaa Allah} (May God protect him).\footnote{384 BBC Languages, “A Guide to Arabic: 10 Facts About the Arabic Language: Famous Quotations,” 2012, \url{http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/other/arabic/guide/facts.shtml}}

\textbf{Exchange 26: My son, Ahmed}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Somali:</th>
<th>This is my son Ahmed.</th>
<th>kan waa weelkeyga aHmed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>He looks so smart, may God protect him.</td>
<td>waHoo oo igyahey 'agleelo, maasha allaah.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\section*{Education}

Rural children have long learned family and clan histories, practical life skills, and Islamic wisdom through Somalia’s strong traditions of oral memorization and recitation. Wandering teachers or local \textit{wadaddo} (religious specialists) taught youngsters, mostly boys, to read and write Qur’anic verses in Arabic.\footnote{385 Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi, \textit{Culture and Customs of Somalia} (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 161.} Colonial administrators attempted to extend Western-style, secular education beyond cities, but found it difficult to recruit and train teachers and to convince parents and adult learners that the educational programs were valuable. The cultural bias against education for females (male teachers believed it was below their dignity to teach girls) was compounded by the refusal of rural families to send their daughters away from home for schooling.\footnote{386 Lee Cassanelli and Farah Sheikh Abdikadir, “Somalia: Education in Transition,” \textit{Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies} 7 (2007): 96–98, \url{http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1066&context=bildhaan}} In the 1970s, a national literacy campaign increased school attendance among settled Somalis, and in the 1980s, primary education was extended to nomadic children.\footnote{387 Helen Chapin Metz, ed., “Country Profile: Society,” in \textit{Somalia: A Country Study} (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), \url{http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/sotoc.html}} Still, formal education began to decline in the 1980s and was completely eradicated with the outbreak of civil war in 1991. (The national teacher training center was looted in 1992 and subsequently turned into a refugee camp.)\footnote{388 Susan M. Hassig, \textit{Cultures of the World: Somalia} (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 2000), 64.} Present-day refugee camps house Somali children who arrive with no idea of what a school or a teacher is.\footnote{389 Lee Cassanelli and Farah Sheikh Abdikadir, “Somalia: Education in Transition,” \textit{Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies} 7 (2007): 104, \url{http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1066&context=bildhaan}}

Subsequent efforts to restart rural schools are localized and fragmented, and supported mainly by Arab and Islamic aid organizations. The traditional \textit{dugsi}, a Qur’anic school for young children
that is built, financed, and maintained by a local community, has survived recent decades of political upheaval. It is the first (and perhaps the only) educational institution that a rural child attends. When girls are admitted, they study separately from boys.

Regional Ways of Life

Wandering Herders

Because much of Somalia is too arid for crop production, most rural Somalis are nomadic or seminomadic. Their principal source of livelihood is raising cattle, camels, sheep, and goats. Nomads travel with their herds to ensure that the animals have continued access to water and food. They carry their few belongings on their pack animals. These animals are their main source of transportation, food, and clothing

When making camp, Somali nomads assemble portable homes from tree branches and roots covered by woven grass mats. A private inner area, the aqal, is surrounded by a thorn fence. Daily activities begin and end with the milking of animals. At night, a large fire is lit in the ardaa (men’s fire corner) to ward off wild animals and welcome family members and visitors. The diet of Somali nomads consists mainly of milk, meat, and other animal products. Vessels for drinking milk are sterilized with heat, smoke, and “scrub brushes” of burning wood. Breakfast is cold, lunch may be skipped when herding away from home camp, and the evening meal is cooked.

Livestock and livestock-related products are the main commodities for trade at markets and export abroad. Seasonal markets are both social events and political gatherings. During the long rainy season, known as gu, young men court and marry. They also engage in fights that have to be settled by their elders.

Pastoralist society among Somali males is fundamentally egalitarian. Councils of men, in which each man has basically the same status and function, make decisions. Although these largely democratic councils can veer toward anarchy and become unruly, they are constrained to a degree by hierarchical influences of age, seniority, wealth, and lineage

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http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1066&context=bildhaan
396 Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi, Culture and Customs of Somalia (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 151.
397 Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi, Culture and Customs of Somalia (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 151.
399 Cultural Orientation, “Somalis: Social Structure and Gender Roles,” 18 February 2004,
http://www.cal.org/co/somali/ssoc.html
**Farmer-Herders**

Farmers—Somali, Bantu, and others—live in the fertile agricultural zone between the Juba and the Shabelle rivers in southern Somalia. The environmental conditions near Hargeysa in the northwest also support some farming. Northwestern farmers use plows, oxen, and tractors to increase their yields and raise their incomes.400 Subsistence crops include corn, millet, sorghum, beans, fruit, and vegetables.401 These groups keep sheep and goats as well as chickens and cows. Camels are highly valued.402 Rural villagers keep livestock for their city-dwelling relatives.403

Daily life in a rural village is characterized by men working in the fields and women tending animals and gardens close to the homestead. Round, wattle-and-daub houses are typical in the south, while angular adobe buildings are found in the north. High walls of stone, brick, or wattle enclose a surrounding courtyard that may contain a kitchen and outbuildings.404

In Somali farm villages, the position of headman becomes important.405 Culturally, a social hierarchy developed along with practices of negotiations and peaceful conflict resolutions. The Digil clan family is said to have established a central government before the Italian colonial period.406

In rural areas, when a new project is undertaken, a visitor may be invited to join in the discussions. Villagers affected by the matter or tribal elders are usually included as well. The villagers may slaughter a sheep or goat and prepare an enormous meal in the visitor’s honor. After the food has been prepared, everyone sits on the ground and eats without forks, knives, spoons, or individual plates. All this is done to honor the guest. To refuse is to dishonor the villagers because it might call into question the sincerity of the matter being discussed.

**At the Checkpoint Border Crossings and Checkpoints**

People often do not carry identification cards in Somalia. When asking for identification, do so politely. The following exchange provides an example of how to ask a Somali for identification.

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400 Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi, *Culture and Customs of Somalia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 158.
Exchange 27: IDs, please.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>May I trouble you for your IDs, please?</th>
<th>dib haa kogo ahaatey akonsigaagee meyey?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>Here, take them.</td>
<td>waa kan kaado.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unrelated Males and Females

If at all possible, allow families to stay together at a checkpoint; do not separate them. Do not place males and females in the same group if they are not related. For example, if you are guarding a checkpoint and you must order passengers on a bus to step off for questioning, try to lead the males into one group and the females into another.

Addressing Women

It is advisable to enlist a female coalition soldier to speak with women. Doing so will protect their honor. If a female soldier is not available, a male soldier should refrain from speaking directly to a Somali woman. He should instead address one of her male family members. On the other hand, a female soldier may speak directly with a Somali man without reservation.

Exchange 28: Your ID, Ma’am.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Ma’am, your ID please.</th>
<th>walaal akonsigaaga meyey?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali woman:</td>
<td>I do not have an ID.</td>
<td>ma haaysto akonsee.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you are a male soldier, do not touch Somali women. If you are a male soldier and you touch a Somali woman, there could be lethal consequences.

Landmines

Most armed factions in Somalia probably have mines. The UN reported the transfer of mines from Eritrea and Ethiopia to Somali fighters between 2002 and 2006, and Reuters reported their sale at arms markets in Somalia in 2009. Mines and other explosive remnants of war are believed to be widespread throughout Somalia, primarily in the south-central region. Recently, non-state armed groups have increased their use of command-detonated improvised explosive devices, which media have described as landmines.

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Chapter 5 Assessment

1. Clan family membership is most significant among Somalis of nomadic heritage.
   **True**
   The characteristics of a clan-based society apply mostly to Somalia’s majority nomadic population. Settled Somalis may develop additional ties to place of residence and local communities.

2. Rural Somalis generate a large surplus of goods.
   **False**
   Rural Somalis, although they participate in trade to an extent, have a subsistence economy. When drought years interrupt subsistence production, hundreds of thousands of rural residents migrate to cities and refugee camps.

3. In Somali farm villages, the position of headman becomes important for negotiation and peaceful conflict resolution.
   **True**
   Nomadic pastoralist society tends to be more egalitarian (and more argumentative) than farmer-herder society.

4. The most widespread ailment in rural Somalia is HIV/AIDS.
   **False**
   Malnutrition is widespread in rural and urban areas. The UN, in its 2012 Consolidated Appeal for Somalia, estimates that 4 million people, including 2.5 million rural inhabitants, require food aid.

5. Somali cultural restrictions on gender interactions are relaxed in rural areas, where a male may address or touch an unrelated female in public.
   **False**
   Male soldiers should not approach a Somali woman directly, but instead address a male member of the woman’s family.
CHAPTER 6: FAMILY LIFE

Introduction

Somalis greatly value family and heritage. A person’s lineage represents a lifelong source of identity. The protection of family honor is crucial. The family that surrounds one in daily life may include parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Loyalty to family means giving social and financial support to relatives and receiving help in times of need.

Decades of war and famine have affected the Somali family in a number of ways. Clan-based violence has heightened mistrust within families and halted some traditional practices related to intermarriage among clans. As the authority of elders weakens, teenage marriages, divorces, and the number of young mothers raising children on their own are on the rise. Because many men have been killed in battle or have lost their traditional livelihoods following natural disasters, women have been forced to head households and become breadwinners. Decades of hardship have made the international diaspora an essential source of economic support for many Somalis.

The Somali Family and Household

Parents and children form the nuclear family, the basic unit of Somali life. The father is the head of the family. He looks after the education of the children (especially sons) and represents the family in public arenas. The mother is responsible for raising the children and keeping house (which may extend to tending sheep and crops near the homestead). Somalis approach child rearing as a group task: A woman’s sisters, older daughters, and others such as aunts jointly supervise her children.

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410 For example, a woman who married outside her clan family watched as her husband and sons become enemies of her mother. She now advises her children to marry only members of their father’s clan family. See Amina Mohamoud Warsame, “Crisis or Opportunity? Somali Women Traders and the War,” in Somalia: The Untold Story: The War Through the Eyes of Somali Women, eds. Judy el Bushra and Judith Gardner (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 136–37.
413 Mohamed Dirieye Abdullahi, Culture and Customs of Somalia (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 142.
strongest family bonds. For example, a woman remains part of her father’s clan even after she marries; only her children bind her to her husband’s clan. Most children live at home until they marry. In keeping with Islamic tradition, children are taught that they should care for their aging parents.

**Exchange 29: Are you related?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Are you related?</th>
<th>karaabo miyaad tiheen?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>No, we are not.</td>
<td>maaya waHba iskoomaa neehin.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exchange 30: How are you related?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>How are you related?</th>
<th>maHaad iskoo tiheen?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>He is my cousin.</td>
<td>waHaan nahaay ilmo adeyr.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The extended family—particularly the father’s clan—often pools resources to support relatives. For example, funds may be pooled so that someone can be sent to school or travel abroad to seek work. Extended families may also live together. It is not uncommon for several siblings to live under the same roof with their children and relatives such as grandparents, in-laws, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Under Islamic law, a man may have as many as four wives, but only if he can support them equally. Polygamy is more common in rural areas. Educated and urban women increasingly object to the practice. Somali expect each wife to receive a separate home.

Somalis expect each wife to receive a separate home. If this is the case, the name of the man is on the deed to all properties. When a man is with another wife, he is said to be at “his other house.” Asking for the father of a wife’s children is a polite way of asking for her husband.

**Exchange 31: His other house**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Where is the father of your children?</th>
<th>meyey 'aroortaada aabahod?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali woman:</td>
<td>In his other house.</td>
<td>kureegeesa kale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>Thank you.</td>
<td>mahadsanid.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Speaking with Somali Family Members**

*Addressing Women*

An older woman should be addressed as *eedo*. This is similar to “ma’am,” although the term carries more respect. It is appropriate to call a younger woman *walaál*, which literally means

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“my sister” but carries the meaning “miss” or “ma’am.” A male should avoid speaking to any Somali woman; rather, he should address a male member of the woman’s family.

Usually only family members, relatives, and close family friends are permitted to ask a man, “How is your wife?” A man should never ask another man about his wife or any other female members of the man’s family. But it is appropriate for a man to ask, “How is your family?” It is acceptable for a woman to ask about the women in the family.

Exchange 32: How’s the family?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>How are you, how’s the family?</th>
<th>iskaa waran, rerka ka waran?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>Thanks to God, they are fine, thanks.</td>
<td>al-Hamdu lilaah, wey fee'an yiheen, mahadsanid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>Thanks to God.</td>
<td>al-Hamdu lilaah.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Addressing Men

It is customary to address an older male as adeer to show respect. It is not acceptable to call a younger man by his name unless he is a friend. Additionally, the term sheikh should not be used to address anyone because it may be construed as derogatory.

When standing and talking with someone, avoid direct eye contact, particularly if the conversation is heated. Avoid staring at people in general; this behavior might be perceived as a challenge. If you are involved in a confrontation, do not invade the other person’s personal space; otherwise, a fight might break out.

Exchange 33: After you, please.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Please get in.</th>
<th>fadlan so gal.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>No, please, after you.</td>
<td>maanya, walaal adeega eega hormar.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Elders, Adolescents, and Children

In Somali society, elders (odayal) are respected men whose life experiences, public speaking abilities, wisdom, and piety preserve traditions and resolve problems for families, clan families,
and communities. Women are excluded from the council of elders, but gain influence and respect within their gender-segregated sphere. Forces outside the family have eroded the authority of elders. These include economic opportunities for young people with suspect employers (from colonial governors and plantation owners to warlords and pirates), state attempts during the Barre regime to crush clan power and authority, and the forced separation of families in the population displacements following war and famine.

Boys in Somalia traditionally have a long adolescence and young adulthood. They have sufficient time to become financially stable before getting married (generally between the ages of 25 and 30). This pattern, reinforced by the colonial preference for unaccompanied male workers in cities, probably contributes to current social problems such as high urban unemployment, khat addiction, and recruitment of the young to militias and pirate groups. Girls, in contrast, may be betrothed before puberty, and married by age 14 or 15. Girls fortunate enough to attend secondary school and university marry after the completion of their education. The Somali Republic declared 18 the age of voting and legal responsibility.

Children are highly valued in Somalia. A woman’s status increases with the number of children she bears. (In 2006, Somalia’s average fertility rate was 6.7 children per woman.) Newborns remain in the home with their mothers for 40 days, protected from the evil eye by a special bracelet made of string and an herb called malmal. Children are breastfed for about two years. (Solid food is introduced at six months.) At an early age, children are encouraged to pay close attention to their surroundings, to become self-reliant, and to perform family work with their parents and older siblings.

The Somali Life Cycle

Somalis offer prayers and perform rituals for a child before it is born. A week to 40 days after birth, the naming ritual occurs. The family usually slaughters a ram for a feast and often consults a wadaad (local religious specialist) about the best name for the infant. Certain names are traditionally

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reserved for first children: Faadumo for the first girl and Muhammad for the first boy. Male twins are usually named Hassan and Hussein. Boys are circumcised somewhere between the ages of 5 and 8; circumcision of girls takes place between the ages of 4 and 11.

Historically, marriage has been arranged, and sometimes forced, but many couples nowadays choose their own mates. Some Somalis prefer endogamy, marriage within one’s clan-based group. (Scorned minority groups practice endogamy by default.) Others have traditionally practiced exogamy, marriage between rival clan-based groups, which may help maintain peace among competing groups. In all cases, the two families involved in a marriage are mutually obligated to a series of rituals and economic exchanges. An “engagement” payment of cash from the groom’s to the bride’s family is ceremonially redistributed among all participants in both families. The groom also gives the bride a maher of items, such as gold, land, cash, or livestock, personally selected by the bride. If a divorce occurs later on, this payment becomes the wife’s settlement. Marriage and its associated costs have been blamed for fighting among clan militias and recent growth of piracy.

Divorce is common. Reports differ about whether children of divorced parents more frequently remain with their mother or father. Women usually do not want their children raised by another wife of their ex-husband, but men may want to retain custody of their sons in order to preserve lineage.

Somalis follow Islamic death rituals. The body is washed, covered in white, and buried under soil and stones by men. Green branches may be placed over the stones. In accordance with Somali custom, women come after the men have finished to sprinkle water on the grave. Commemorative meals may be prepared soon after a burial, a year later, and from then on at the discretion of the surviving children. To establish the paternity of any future children, a woman who has lost her husband does not marry for several months.

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433 Mohamed Diriey Abdullahi, Culture and Customs of Somalia (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 134.
**Somali Naming Conventions**

A complete Somali name has at least three components and often four, five, or more.\(^{445, 446, 447}\) As in the West, Somali parents give a newborn child a personal first name. For example, a boy might be named Muhammad and a girl Faadumo.

The first name is followed by the child’s father’s personal name. If the child Muhammad has a father whose first name is Husayn, the child’s name will be Muhammad Husayn. Because the rule applies to boys and girls, Muhammad’s sister, Faadumo, will be Faadumo Husayn. Thus, the father’s first name becomes the child’s middle or second name.

A Somali’s third name is the personal name of one’s father’s father (paternal grandfather). This rule also applies to both boys and girls.

Women do not change their names at marriage. All Somalis keep their three names, which mark their patrilineal heritage, throughout their lives. Because all three names come from a shared pool of personal names, many Somalis have names that are the same or similar. This differs from Western surnames, which come from various pools of names and often change at marriage.

Although a Somali’s three names are generally used on official documents (passport, national ID, driver’s license, etc.), they do not necessarily represent a person’s full name. Complete Somali names may include additional names based on affiliation with broad kin groups such as lineages, subclans, and clans.

**Differentiation by Clan Names**

Adding a clan name after the paternal grandfather’s name (for example, Muhammad Husayn Ali Isaaq and Muhammad Husayn Ali Abgaal) helps Somalis differentiate among themselves. The first three names of the two men are identical, but the clan names (Isaaq and Abgaal) serve to distinguish one man from the other. Somalis may also differentiate themselves by adding the name of the place where they grew up.

**Prefixes and Suffixes in Somali Names**

Somalis name their children in a fashion similar to Arabs. Many Somali personal names are of Arabic origin, and both naming systems emphasize fathers. Another shared naming practice is the addition of a prefix or suffix to a personal name, such as Abd- (“servant of”) or Ina- (“son of” or “daughter of”).\(^{448, 449}\) Recall in the

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previous example that Muhammad’s father is named Husayn. Muhammad will take such pride in Husayn that he will name himself after his father. He will call himself Ina Husayn, “Son of Husayn.” Soon his relatives, friends, neighbors, and coworkers will start calling him Ina Husayn instead of Muhammad.

**Nicknames or Naanays**

Perhaps because so many Somali names are similar, nearly all men and some women are identified by public nicknames or *naanays*.

**Exchange 34: Do you have a nickname?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do you have a nickname?</th>
<th>naaneys ma le dahaay?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>No, I don’t.</td>
<td>maaya ma lihee.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are two kinds of *naaney*. One is an obvious nickname, similar to a Western nickname, and may be used to address a person directly.

**Exchange 35: Overt nicknames**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Please, I am looking for Ahmed Abdul-Kadir.</th>
<th>fadlan waHaan traadeeniya naa aHmed 'abdul-kaadir.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>I know, you mean the tall Ahmed? You might find him in the market.</td>
<td>waan ogaheey, waHaad oola cheydaa aHmed derey? waa laga yaabaa eenaad ka hesho sooka.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>Thank you.</td>
<td>mahadsanid.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The other kind of *naaney* is a secret nickname. It is used to talk about a person, but would rarely be used to address that person directly.

**Exchange 36: Covert nicknames**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do you know Liban Omar?</th>
<th>miyaad takaan leevan 'umar?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali:</td>
<td>The man with only two cows.</td>
<td>nin-ka laba sa'aalaha a.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Origins of Names**

The origin of many Somali names is Arabic or Cushitic. Most names have a meaning and certain names are given to indicate the time of birth, physical characteristics, birth order, and so on.

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Chapter 6 Assessment

1. The Somali family has remained unchanged throughout recent decades of war and famine.
   False
   Weakened authority of family elders, more teenage marriages, and increased responsibilities for women are some of the many changes facing contemporary Somali families.

2. Because of Islamic influence, divorce is very uncommon in Somalia.
   False
   Divorce is common. Women usually do not want their children raised by another wife of their ex-husband, but men may want to retain custody of their sons in order to preserve lineage.

3. Somali men may have up to four wives.
   True
   Islam permits up to four spouses for men (providing a man can support them equally), but does not allow multiple spouses for women. Somalis expect a man to provide each wife with her own home.

4. Because so many Somali names are similar, older Somalis should be addressed by their nicknames (naanays).
   False
   The proper term of address for an older women is eedo; for an older man it is adeer.

5. A complete Somali name has at least three components: the person’s first, or personal, name, followed by the father’s personal name, and then the paternal grandfather’s personal name.
   True
   The personal names of newborn Somali boys and girls are followed by their father’s first name and their paternal grandfather’s first name.
1. Somalia’s coastline is the longest on the continent.  
   True / False

2. The majority of Somalia’s population lives a nomadic lifestyle.  
   True / False

3. Conflicts among Somali clans contributed to the fall of the Somali Republic in 1991.  
   True / False

4. Italians have been the most influential nonindigenous people to settle in Somalia.  
   True / False

5. Without a formal banking system, Somalis no longer use money and barter goods instead.  
   True / False

6. Since the fall of the central government in 1991, Islamist groups have enforced a severe version of shari’a in some regions of Somalia.  
   True / False

7. In Somalia, Islamic law traditionally governed diya payment (compensation for a clan member’s injury or death).  
   True / False

8. Somalia has begun to permit mosques for women.  
   True / False

9. The celebratory feast at the end of Ramadan is called Eid al-Adha.  
   True / False

10. Anyone with a head covering and with shoes removed can enter a Somali mosque.  
    True / False

11. In Somalia, the freedom to act as one chooses may be constrained by the responsibilities of loyalty to one’s family or clan.  
    True / False

12. Somalis traditionally eat with communal plates and utensils. It is customary to eat from a shared spoon, then pass it to your right.  
    True / False

13. It is acceptable for a male soldier to shake hands with a Somali woman.  
    True / False
14. Somalis view their firearms as protective weapons and fire them only in defense of family, property, or honor.  
   True / False

15. Generosity is both highly valued and, by tradition, obligatory among Somalis.  
   True / False

16. War has destroyed all urban infrastructure in Somalia.  
   True / False

17. Since the 1990s, Western-style secular education has become the main form of schooling in Somalia.  
   True / False

18. Improved sanitation services and medical care are available in cities, but the urban poor may not have access to either.  
   True / False

   True / False

20. Urban unemployment is fueled by young men from the countryside looking for work.  
   True / False

21. Not every Somali belongs to a major clan family.  
   True / False

22. The dominant Samaale clan families (Daarood, Hawiye, Isaaq, Dir) are concentrated in the fertile lands between the Juba and the Shabelle rivers.  
   True / False

23. In Qur’anic schools, Somalis learn to disregard superstitions such as the evil eye.  
   True / False

24. Most of Somalia’s roads are unpaved, making them unusable when it rains.  
   True / False

25. Somalia’s civil war was caused by conflict between the pastoralist Samaale clan families (Daarood, Hawiye, Isaaq, Dir) and the agriculturalist Sab clan families (Digil, Rahanwiin).  
   True / False

26. Somali males traditionally do not marry until they are somewhere between 25 and 30 years old.  
   True / False

27. A Somali man and woman who have the same two last names (second and third names) are husband and wife.  
   True / False
28. According to Islamic tradition, only men can take place in the physical burial of the dead.  
**True / False**

29. Since the onset of civil war, birthrates in Somalia have declined dramatically to below replacement levels.  
**True / False**

30. During the Barre regime, the Somali state worked to decrease the power of clan elders.  
**True / False**
FURTHER READING

Books


Reports and Papers
